

Vauxhall Corsa

Featured model: 1.7DTi 3dr Elegance



IN ITS DAY THE EARLIER CORSA (and Nova) 1.5-litre turbo-diesel, with indirect injection, was the best diesel supermini, in our book. Its technical merit outstripped the rest of the car, however, but the Corsa kept selling – to prospective owners who presumably liked its style and its roomy accommodation.

The new Corsa has changed these assumptions. In some directions the interior isn't as roomy but underneath, its power units and suspension are now properly located on a sub-frame. This has produced much crisper, more precise handling, better sound insulation (especially in the 1.2 16v petrol version) and better crash protection.

This test is of the higher-powered new diesel, however. As before, it's from Isuzu but has been converted to direct injection and, at 1.7 litres, produces more power and torque to contend with the new model's increased weight.

The diesel story through the late nineties has been one of no real improvement in terms of fuel economy, but of much reduced tail-pipe pollution. So, this latest car's 55-65mpg normal range puts it ahead of most current counterparts, although owners of five-year-old Corsa TDs won't notice much difference. Its turbo still tends to cut in too abruptly (at around 1700rpm), but it certainly generates a head of steam that makes overtaking very easy without much gearchanging.

That gearchange still isn't as positive as some, by the way, but the accelerator

action is much cleaner than the old diesel's.

In several respects, this new Corsa, like Ford's Fiesta, pays more attention to the driver's well-being and less to rear passengers' – especially this three door. The new Skoda Fabia and some of the semi-MPV-style hatchbacks do better with more attention to detail. The Corsa does have a variable-rake rear backrest, however, as well as three proper seatbelts. It's also possible to detach the (flimsy) rear cushion hinges from their location and make room for long, slimmer objects, through to the fascia.

Our track tests revealed that the brakes give creditable emergency stopping power, with no fade under duress; this was with the extra-cost ABS, however. The handbrake is heavy-going, though.

VERDICT

This new diesel, like the new Corsa in general, almost cuts the mustard. It's fast, frugal and, at mid-range speeds, very refined. However, this latter quality is more consistently delivered by the 1.2 petrol version of equivalent power – which probably costs 27 per cent more to fuel.

The new Corsa is a real improvement in most respects. Its road manners in particular make it a good choice for keener drivers, but with the new Polo and Fiesta coming over the horizon, it will be interesting to see if it's good enough.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★○○
Controls/displays	★★★○○
Safety	★★★○○
Handling/steering	★★★○○
Comfort	★★○○○
Fuel economy	★★★★○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1686cc, 4-cylinder, diesel; 75bhp at 4400rpm, 122 lb ft at 1800-3000rpm; belt-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 24.6mph/1000rpm in 5th, 19.7 in 4th

suspension front: sub-frame-mounted wishbones with damper/struts, integral coil springs. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle with compound link location and coil springs

steering electric power assistance; 2.9 turns lock-to-lock; 10.35m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.75m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front drums rear, with optional extra electronic anti-lock control test car

wheels/tyres 5in steel or alloy with 175/65R14T tyres (alloy wheels on Elegance test car); full-size spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

beam trim/dial dim sensibly set apart sunglasses holder in roof panel screen/face level air simultaneously variable rear seat backrest rake

low-set obscure warning lamps no timer on heated rear glass switch prominent load sill just paint on rear seatbacks

THE CORSA RANGE

body 3 and 5 door supermini, mid-priced.
trim levels Club/GLS, Comfort, Elegance, SXi, SRi

engines petrol: 3 cylinder/1.0/60bhp 4/1.2/75; 4/1.4/90; 4/1.8/125.

diesel: 4/1.7/65(Di); 4/1.7/75(DTi)

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (Auto shift synchromesh option on 1.2; 4-speed with torque converter on 1.4)

